DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 440 CS 209 230

AUTHOR	Sheidley, William E., Ed.; And Others
TITLE	What Is Good Writing? Proceedings of a Conference at the University of Connecticut (Storrs, Connecticut, December 6, 1980).
INSTITUTION	Connecticut Univ., Storrs. Dept. of English.
PUB DATE	85
NOTE	49p.; Prepared through Connecticut Writing Project.
AVAILABLE FROM	Connecticut Writing Project, Department of English (U-25), University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06268 ($2.00).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Freshmen; *Content Area Writing; Higher Education; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

The focus of the conference proceedings in this booklet was evaluation of student writing at various levels and in various fields. The booklet contains a schedule of activities; a description of the morning session, which included a panel discussion on evaluating writing in college freshman composition courses; examples of students' papers, with evaluators' ratings; the full text of the luncheon address, "A Short Long View of Freshman Composition" by Sylvan Barnet; and outlines of the four afternoon workshops: "Writing for Science" by Anthony Phillpotts and Raymond Joesten, "Writing for Business" by Jean Smith, Robin Ray, and Madelyn Vozzola, "Writing for History" by R. Kent Newmyer, and "Writing for the Social Sciences" by Jack Thaw. (EL)

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What is good Writing?

Proceedings of a Conference at The University of Connecticut Storrs, December 6, 1980

Featured Speaker: Professor Sylvan Barnet Tufts University

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William E. Sheidley, Karen K. Jambeck, and Emily Stauffer
With the Assistance of Karen Corcella

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THE CONNECTICUT WRITING PROJECT

The Connecticut Writing Project offers opportunities for growth and professional development to teachers of writing in all disciplines who recognize the worth of using writing as a means of learning any subject matter. A program of the University of Connecticut, Department of English, the Connecticut Writing Project is affiliated with the widely acclaimed National Writing Project, which now has 129 sites in this country and abroad.

In the Project, experienced classroom teachers are trained as Teacher/Consultants in an intensive Summer Institute where they share their expertise and practice writing themselves. Then, during subsequent school years, they present workshops on composition theory and practical strategies for teaching writing to teachers in participating districts.

The approach has proven effective by generating widespread interest in good writing and by upgrading students' abilities as writers and learners. For further information about the Connecticut Writing Project and its programs, please write or call the director:

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The Connecticut Writing Project
Storrs, Connecticut
1985

Acknowledgement

The editors wish to thank the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Connecticut Council of Teachers of English, and the Department of English and Office of Non-Credit Programs of the University of Connecticut for making the conference possible. They are also grateful for the help of the following individuals: Paul Cervoni, A. Harris Fairbanks, William Rosen, David Sonstroem, and J.D. Stahl.

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INTRODUCTION

Over 150 teachers, scholars, and writers met at the Merlin Bishop Center at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, on December 6, 1980, to discuss the evaluation of student writing at various educational levels and in various fields. Many of the participants subsequently joined the Connecticut Writing Project, which was founded partly in order to sustain the fruitful discussion among writing teachers that took place that day. The conference provided invaluable ideas about what constitutes good writing, and it is to share them more widely that we now so tardily publish the proceedings.

The conference was sponsored by the English department of the University of Connecticut and by the Connecticut Council of Teachers of English. It was funded by a generous grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council. This booklet contains synopses of the proceedings of the morning and afternoon sessions and the full text of the luncheon address by Professor Sylvan Barnet, of Tufts University.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

9:00-12:00 Evaluating Writing in Freshman Composition Courses at the College Level

Opening Remarks: Karen K. Jambeck
University of Connecticut

Panel Discussion

Moderator: A. Harris Fairbanks
Director of Freshman English
University of Connecticut

Panelists: Charles Berger, Yale University
Madge Manfred, Mohegan Community College
Richard Reynolds, University of Connecticut
Leo Rockas, University of Hartford
Diane Shugert, Central Connecticut State College

12:00-1:00 Luncheon, Faculty-Alumni Center

Speaker, Sylvan Barnet
"A Short Long View of Freshman Composition"

1:00-4:00 Evaluating Writing Across the Curriculum

Workshops:

Writing for Publishing--Charles Christensen
Publisher, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press

Writing for Business--Jean Smith, Robin Ray, Madelyn Vozzola, Aetna Life & Casualty

Writing for Science--Anthony Philpotts and Raymond Joesten, Professors of Geology and Geophysics, University of Connecticut

Writing for History--R. Kent Newmyer
Professor of History
University of Connecticut

Writing for the Social Sciences--Jack Thaw
Professor of Psychology
University of Connecticut

THE MORNING SESSION

Interest in evaluating student writing derives from several sources. First, the public, now very aware of the "writing crisis," has demanded accountability. Second, the lack of uniform standards for student performance leads to disquieting variations in grading from one teacher to another. And third, a lack of reliable information on the numerous evaluation procedures available may leave instructors, departments, and school systems in confusion about how to address the problem.

The morning session was designed to serve three immediate purposes: to reveal to all conferees the grading practices of writing teachers from several Connecticut colleges; to expand every participant's repertoire of considerations used in judging papers; and to inform teachers of the criteria their colleagues use in evaluation. The sponsors hoped further that the panel discussions would encourage conferees to introduce similar grading sessions into their own schools or departments as a step toward establishing sound, compatible grading principles. Since the conference, several participants have reported that they have indeed initiated such discussions among their colleagues, and to good effect. Even if no single set of standards prevails, sharing personal criteria leads to increased understanding and sophistication in grading.

The morning session of the conference consisted of a panel discussion on the evaluation of papers written by first-semester college freshmen. Before the conference the panelists and conferees graded and annotated five such papers. At the beginning

of the session, the panelists submitted their grades in sealed envelopes, and the rest of the conferees submitted report forms on the papers they had read. The conference examined one paper at a time. The panelists explained their rationale for the grades they had assigned. Thereafter, panelists responded to one another, and finally members of the audience commented on the paper or questioned the panelists. During the discussion of each paper, a graph showing the spread of grades on the papers was distributed, so that the participants could compare their judgments and standards with those of the panelists and the other conferees.

The pages that follow offer first a summary of general issues raised during the morning session's wide-ranging discussion and then the texts of the four papers that were considered, together with a summary of the grades assigned and an outline of the strengths and weaknesses the panelists and conferees found in each.

General Summary of the Morning Session

Despite the wide range of grades on some papers, panelists almost always agreed on the main weaknesses and strengths of each paper. At times the panelists' evaluations differed because some were willing to give credit for an idea that a student did not express clearly, while others were unwilling to make such a concession. The chief reason for the disparity in grades, however, was the disparity in criteria. Whereas some panelists rewarded the students' interest in the ideas expressed or their ability to project their personalities onto paper, others emphasized grammar

and mechanics or purpose and attention to audience. Emphases seemed to reflect the methods, organization, and aims of composition courses the panelists teach. Nevertheless, although criteria and hence grades differed, there was remarkably little disagreement over the strengths and weaknesses in structure, content, and style of any given paper. In short, panelists saw the same aspects but differed over the relative importance of those aspects.

Three major issues arose in the discussions: the context for grading, the variables that affect objective grading, and the uses of grades. Some members of the panel and audience felt that grading papers at the conference was significantly different from grading them for a class. Many pointed out that, because the students graded in the conference were anonymous, it was easier to give strict grades than it is in the ordinary classroom, where the students and teacher are friends. Some of the panelists said that they felt at a loss to decide on a grade because they had no sense of the students' educational background, the needs and previous progress of the students, the class's performance, or the instruction given before the assignment. Some did not like grading an essay without some knowledge of the process that produced it. Ignorance of the context, then, led panelists to differ in their grading. One avoided the grade of C in order to dramatize his preferences among the papers; others graded the papers as though submitted by members of their own classes.

Throughout the session the panel and the audience mentioned variables affecting the objectivity of their evaluations. One

conferee pointed out that teachers' knowledge of their students' personalities may color their grading. Similarly, the panelists recognized a difficulty in grading when the teacher disagrees strongly with the student's position. Teachers may be less strict in demanding support for points with which they sympathize, or, conversely, they may overcompensate for possible prejudice by giving lenient grades to papers defending opinions they dislike. A number of panelists also remarked that teachers find some topics and styles of writing more appealing than others, and all agreed that the assignment itself profoundly influences the quality of the student's production.

When assignments are carefully delineated, better papers are the result. Conferees urged that teachers construct assignments that engage students in critical thinking rather than setting merely mechanical exercises in research. Certain topics, it was agreed, admit a high degree of subjectivity and expressiveness; others demand objectivity. When students are allowed to select their own topics rather than writing on a subject chosen by the teacher, one conferee observed, the difficulties of evaluation are multiplied, but the students' ability to express their own thoughts and not the somewhat different skill of deciphering the teacher's intentions is more clearly displayed.

However the topic of a student paper is assigned or selected, the panelists agreed that teachers can help students write better by shaping an audience for them. A clear sense of audience helps writers to determine the tone of their papers and to make numerous troublesome stylistic decisions, such as whether

to use the first person--inappropriate in much technical writing, for example, but effective in the familiar essay. Conferees agreed that although teachers should encourage students to develop a distinctive voice as writers, they can aid students most by offering some assignments that allow for personal expression and some that require more objectivity--and by helping students to understand when each mode is appropriate.

Another issue debated was the use of the grade. Some panelists gave grades intended to reflect their objective assessment of the student's writing. One, however, gave a very low grade to a paper that had numerous grammatical and mechanical errors in order to show the writer the importance of correcting errors he might otherwise take casually. Another panelist gave a high grade as encouragement to a student whose paper, though flawed, showed originality, engagement, and promise. Yet another panelist explained that he does not give the grade of F to students of marginal abilities or disadvantaged backgrounds; rather, a paper that does not meet the minimum course requirements must be rewritten. Keeping the student in class, working, is of utmost importance; revisions, frequent conferences, and having students keep folders containing their various drafts and papers are three methods that help serve this purpose.

Grading practices such as these follow from the conviction expressed by many at the conference that the evaluation of student writing should not be confined to a simple post-mortem report on a student's essay. Truly useful evaluation is a continuing process, which begins as the student begins to write,

continues through the writing process, and continues through the semester. As the student's skills develop, so too must the modes, methods, and standards of evaluation.

But finally, the instructor is obliged to evaluate those skills the student has acquired by the end of the course or to stamp the seal of its quality in the abstract on a given written product. Here it is important to take into account the kind of writing being judged. Conferees teaching technical writing have a firmly established set of criteria for evaluation involving audience, organization, directness, clarity, and accuracy, but all agreed that standards developed for technical writing do not treat creative writing fairly, or vice-versa. One panelist said that he insists students work on writing mechanics but does not lower grades because of mechanical errors. Another said that he stresses style early in the semester, argument later. Thus, although the manifold occasions for grading and and the multifarious purposes to which it is put in teaching students to write imply that absolute standards rigidly applied are a goal beyond easy reach and perhaps not worth seeking, agreement on what virtues are to be hoped for in student writing, whatever the context and however emphasized or presented, can be readily attained when teachers share their opinions and criteria with one another.

What is good writing in freshman composition courses? Although grading principles differed, most participants seemed to value the same general qualities in writing. A good paper should have a clear, well-defined thesis that is sensibly ordered, logically developed, and concretely supported. Good writers express

their ideas precisely in clear, direct, fluid prose that is free of grammatical and mechanical errors, and that conforms to the conventions of the language of their audience. They define their terms, think through their topics, and present their material honestly and completely.

Paper I

POORTALK

In the article "Let's Cut Out the Poortalk" the co-authors David Myers and Thomas Ludwig tell us about something we all do, "Poortalk", also that it must be stopped in order for us to accept the economic change that is expected. Although I understand what they mean by "Poortalk" the article did not prove to me that it must be discontinued.

The authors begin their opinionated article by stating that inflation is no more than "A debilitating idea afflicting American thinking." Inflation is no more an idea than a gallon of oil costing 99.9 cents and possibly more at the next delivery. It would seem to me that in anyones mind this one source of unpredictability is grounds enough to cause concern. Of course this alone could be easily accepted but in combination with other inflationary factors it is a true basis for warranted complaint.

Myers and Ludwig seem to toy with the phrases ". . .inadequate salaries" and ". . .rising costs. . ." as if there were no bais for the existance. In fact, the rate of inflation has increased more rapidly than that of most wage scales. For example, a wage increase of seven percent in one period seems little if not microscopic in comparison with an inflation rate of approximately twelve to eighteen percent for the same period. If this isn't reason enough for "Poortalk," there's more.

The authors state ". ..that buying power is not less than it used to be" and goes on to compare the purchasing power of twenty years past to today, a comparison having no proportionate value. If they were to make a useful comparison it would be the difference between our present purchasing power and that of perhaps two or three years past. Their comparison is as useful as that of the purchasing power of today versus that of our prehistoric ancestors.

It is not to say that the use of "Poortalk" does not have some psychological effect, however, it cannot be considered the cause of our present day economic situation. If it were this simple the problem could very easily be resolved. The authors seem to oversimplify the cause and effect of such a complex problem.

The authors state that "We enjoy complaining and

commiserating. ..", if this is true we must be a very unhappy lot. It may be true that some of us enjoy complaining but to generalize and place all Americans in that one group certainly is without basis. It can be agreed that what we say does influence what we think and feel and so "Poortalk" does play some part in our dissatisfaction with life but only a small part.

The authors attempt to link the concept of "Poortalk" with religion. Religion can be very comforting and be at times our last ray of hope, however, economics and any other science should not and cannot rely on religion as a cure all, perhaps as a source of englightenment for God helps those who help themselves.

In their reference to religion they state "Happy are those who renounce selfish ambition. .." it seems to me that as far back as the beginning of man the need to be warm, fed, housed and clothed were not merely selfish ambitions but basic necessities. The authors use of religious reference has no basis in the matter.

It is agreed that there are people more underprivileged than ourselves. This may bring some comfort to us but cannot be considered a resolution to the problem of inflation.

Although inflation is a real problem to today's economy a simple shift in our way of thinking is certainly not going to better it. "Poortalk" does not cause escalating interest rates or fuel bills. A decline in the use of "Poortalk" might comfort us in today's economic confusion but it will not resolve it.

Evaluators' Responses to "Poortalk"

GRADES: B, C, D, D, F

STRENGTHS:

1. Explicit thesis, but weak.
2. Healthy skepticism, though somewhat excessive.

WEAKNESSES:

1. Weak thesis
2. Punctuation
   a. Comma splices
   b. Lack of apostrophes
   c. Run-on sentences
3. Emotive writing
4. Weak syntax
5. Rudimentary reasoning
6. Lack of definition for key terms

Comments on this "reaction paper" varied. Some panelists praised the student for using specific details to counter some of the comments made in the original article and to support her own argument. However, others criticized the student for failing to recapitulate the argument in the article she discusses. Still others felt the student tends to fault the author for mistakes she herself makes, for example, calling the article "opinionated and over-simplified." One panelist judged that the paragraphing is good, with one idea per paragraph. Another objected to the isolation of one idea per paragraph because the writing appears too journalistic; rather, developing two ideas per paragraph would result in thorough argument. Some praised the student's prose, saying that it flows smoothly. They also noted the student's success in integrating quotations, and the student's appropriate use of a variety of transitions. Other panelists held a contrary opinion; saying the student has little sense of the ordinary uses of the rhetorical or logical expression.

Paper II

SHOULD PORNOGRAPHY BE CENSORED?

The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees American citizens certain basic freedoms, and one of the most important privileges is freedom of the press. But, unlike any unconditional freedom, this has been abused in that pornography is now a two-billion dollar a year industry in this country.* Pornography in America is no longer an underground, clandestine industry. It flourishes on the streets of just about every large city.

What exactly is pornography? Why is it such a hotly debated subject? The first question does not have just one concrete definition. As D.H. Lawrence states, "what is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another."* In other words, each person's definition of pornography differs. But is the degrading of the human body (especially women's) really the "laughter of genius"? The type of pornography I am talking about is the type one encounters while walking down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, or Park Square in Boston, and the list goes on. This type of obscene "art" has been the subject of many Supreme Court decisions in the past ten years. In 1966, it was agreed that local jurors must decide for themselves what offended standards of taste, and therefore should not be permitted to be offered to the public. Deciding what offends the people, though is another matter.

I am against pornography being publicly advertised because it has no real social value. In fact, it is an industry that is crime-dominated, and can have adverse affects on the community itself. For example, surveys conducted in Chicago indicate that the rate of violent crimes (assaults, rapes, and murders), along with narcotics convictions increased over 125% when certain massage parlors and movie theaters expanded and advertised their services.* Another disgusting example of the harm which pornography can bring to an individual is the current trend of employing

children in various pornographic efforts such as movies and literature. A renowned psychiatrist-lawyer in New York states that "these children are done incalcuable damage. They are left emotionally and spiritually drained."* No matter how much pro-pornographers advertise that their business is harmless, victimless, activity, extensive studies have been done to prove them wrong. According to a study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley, 25% of all rapists who are institutionalized or convicted have been found to be regular users of pornographic materials.

There are other reasons why I oppose pornography and agree with those who say it should not be allowed to grow as a commercial industry. But, as I said before, it is an easy matter to decide what is offensive, but it is another matter entirely to get it off the streets. Pornography is an industry that is dominated by organized crime. Although local jurors may decide what may or may not be offensive to their community, there is not much that they can do to remove this social disease. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that since most pornography is under the control of organized crime, local and even state officials cannot remove it by their actions alone. Under the United States judicial codes, organized crime is an offense that is dealed with formally only by federal authorities. This means that in the line of authority, the FBI is in charge, with state and local government second and third in line.*

Basically, I oppose pornograpy because of ethical reasons. When people have to rely on books, films, and other materials which demoralize and dehumanize men and women, there is something wrong with our society.

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* Asterisk indicates those points documented with footnotes, which have been omitted in this reproduction.

Evalutors' Response to "Should Pornography Be Censored?"

GRADES: C, C, C, C-, F

STRENGTHS:

1. Attempts to define pornography
2. Recognition of more than one side of the issue

WEAKNESSES:

1. Mechanics

    a. Misspellings
    b. Faulty punctuation
    c. Lack of tense agreement

2. Weak diction
3. Thesis remains unfocused
4. No direct, clear response to questions asked in title
5. Weak reasoning and logical analysis
6. Emotional rather than logical progression of argument

While some panelists praised the student's use of rhetorical questions, others pointed out that the student raised these questions "for effect rather than for discussion." Some panelists said the student stays on the topic, while others claimed the argument is "never clear or sequential." One panelist felt the student develops the third paragraph well, using specific facts. Another, however, found the strongest point of the essay, that pornography is a victimless crime, buried toward the end of the paper. This point, along with a definition of pornography, should have been the center of the essay. Yet another commentator found the topic too broad: the student should have written "either on the question of pornography or on the question of censorship."

Paper III

THE CROSS-LEGGED GIRL

She sat down on the edge of the table with both legs playfully dangling to the music. She didn't sit directly across from him but she made sure she could see him and more importantly, that he could see her. They didn't look directly at one another but they exchanged glances as if taking turns at a game.

She watched his reflection in the window. She watched him look at her while turning the pages of his economics book without studying them, this made her so pleased that she smiled.

He put his book down on the table and turnd his chair towards her, leaning back against the wall so that the two front legs of his chair were off the ground.

She turned away for a minute as if she wasn't interested, but then, to my surprise, she sat back on the table and crossed her legs so she could look directly at him.

Before the cross-legged girl came in, he had been doing homework with another girl who sat next to him. She was now trying to get his attention. She grew impatient, and finally pulled his chair down onto the front legs so that he was facing her. She continued to talk to him. He was obviously thinking of the cross-legged girl but finally heard the girl over his own

thoughts. He turned his chair back towards the desk and began working again.

The cross-legged girl brought her attention back to the window again but this time she looked at herself. She adjusted her collar and pushed back her hair. Her expression saddened as she turned around to see him working again. The girl next to him was proud, having won his attention. She moved closer to him.

The cross-legged girl folded her hands and looked down at them. The joy and assurance left her face. She looked as though she had lost something.

Then, above the muffled voices, I heard him say to the girl studying with him, "I just can't do this homework, not with that pretty girl sitting behind me."

A rush of victory overwhelmed me in great contradiction to the disappointment I saw on the girl's face who sat next to him. It was a battle well fought and a victory well deserved. A battle so subtle that I wondered how many before it had gone overlooked and how many after it would go unwitnessed.

Another such battle I observed was between a couple seated in the cafeteria one afternoon as I ate lunch. They were having an obvious disagreement about something. As I watched them I sensed the girl's tension rise and after a final comment her boyfriend had made, she departed, leaving him alone.

At this point I went back to eating my lunch. I figured that the incident which had just occured was completed. Upon looking up, however, I saw the guy left alone, pick up a glass of milk in one hand and a coke in the other and pour them evenly onto his tray. It wasn't a violent act, and yet, it was an act of violence. I saw the anger drain from his face as the liquid from his glasses drained until he looked up and saw me staring. He was embarrassed but, being so seemed to relieve him a little. He smiled, and got up, leaving his tray behind as the only evidence of what I had just observed.

Evaluators' Responses to "The Cross-Legged Girl"

GRADES: A-, B, B, C, C

STRENGTHS:

1. Good use of detail
2. Style
   a. Natural, easy
   b. Personal
3. Insight into human relations
4. Some sophisticated sentences (e.g., "He finally heard

the girl over his own thoughts.")

5. Good organization in the first half of the paper. (The student avoids the obvious chronological pattern by beginning in the middle of the action and using flashbacks.)

WEAKNESSES:

1. Mechanics

   a. Comma splices
   b. Problems in pronoun reference, especially with "she"

2. Weak sentence structure

   a. Unvaried (The subject-verb pattern is overused.)
   b. Unfocused
   c. Simplistic

3. Inadequate linking of the two events described in the paper

4. Distracting authorial intrusions

Paper IV

"HOGAN'S HEROES" VS. "M.A.S.H."

The television shows "M.A.S.H." and "Hogan's Heroes" can be compared because they have many points in common. Both are set in the midst of wars, "M.A.S.H." in a hospital base in Korea, "Hogan's Heroes" in a P.O.W. camp in Germany. Neither show depicts the enemy as "bad guys." Both shows have one or two "elite" people, Hogan in "Hogan's Heroes" and Pierce and McIntyre in "M.A.S.H.," who dominate the show with their crazy ideas and witty remarks. The prevalent attitude among the main characters in both shows is that they would much prefer not to be at war, but their committment to their country forces them to be. With this attitude in mind all of the people in both shows try to help their country without having to hurt anyone. The characters in "M.A.S.H." however, do so while more frequently voicing their discontent.

Although both shows are made as comedies "Hogan's Heroes" has a second suit in action and adventure. From their P.O.W. camp Hogan runs a spy network which among other things obtains and sends important military information back to the Allies, hides and assists people stuck on the wrong side of the line, and blows up bridges, trains, and anything else they see fit. At every turn Hogan and his men outsmart, outmaneuver, and outlaugh the Germans. These escapades are possible because of the feeble-minded officers in the German army. The security in the camp, and

anywhere inside Germany Hogan decides to go is virtually non-existent and therefore easily and comically overcome. In one episode Hogan and his crew found the location of a nearby downed American plane before the Germans rescued the pilot from his persuers, smuggled both the pilot and the remnants of his plane into camp, rebuilt the entire plane aboveground into a building in camp, and had the pilot escape by flying the plane through the wall of the building and out of the camp right in front of the unbelieving camp commanders. Since the show is only a comedy and not to be taken seriously the audience can overlook these inconsistancies with reality.

M.A.S.H., on the other hand, is much more realistic. It too has it's share of adventure, getting bombed by friends and enemy alike while trying to attend to the swarms of injured soldiers brought back from the front, but it has yet a stronger second suit. So strong in fact that it may be just as important to the show as the comic aspect. This is it's treatment of human relations and attitudes. The setting, a hospital unit 20 miles from the front is very effective in highligting this idea because it puts the characters in a pressure filled, fast moving lifestyle. After spending 14 straight hours in the operating room and then finding out that one's best friend has just been transferred to another unit tends to allow much more emotional flow to be observed than under normal circumstances. M.A.S.H. utilizes many more emtions than are usually seen on a comedy. They range from the sadness of a doctor after losing a patient to the ecstacy felt for friends being sent home to the pain of the reality of remaining behind.

"Hogan's Heroes" is a good show with a good plot and many laughs along the way. "M.A.S.H.," however, doesn't stop there. The sarcastic wit of "Hawkeye" Pierce and "Trapper" John, the futile attempts of "Klinger" to be discharged, the determination of "Hot Lips" and Frank to "clean up" their camp, and Colonel Blake not knowing if it is he or "Radar" who is running the camp somehow makes the show more real and alive and meaningful to the audience.

Evaluators' Responses to "Hogan's Heroes Vs. 'M.A.S.H.'"

GRADES: A, A-, B+, B, C

STRENGTHS:

1. Good focus on contrasts, using differences
2. Ideas well-connected and related
3. Topic effectively narrowed
4. Sophisticated sentence structure (for example, the "commendable parallelism" in the second paragraph)

5. Effective transitions

6. Some good assumptions at beginning of the paper

WEAKNESSES:

1. Mechanics

   a. Faulty pronoun references
   b. Misspellings (e.g., "it's" for "its" and doubling consonants at ends of words)
   c. "Shaky" punctuation

2. Weak diction (e.g., "elite people" and "lifestyle")

3. Some flaws in argument, particularly as the paper develops

4. Thesis put forward timidly and cautiously toward the end of the paper ("M.A.S.H." is the better show because it depicts characters in a more believable way than "Hogan's Heroes" does.)

5. Failure to venture beyond obvious comments

6. Ambiguous statements

7. Incomplete statements

8. Long sentences that become ungrammatical

One panelist asserted: "This is an attractive paper; college writing functioning as it should. The student takes the challenge of comparison; she chooses something from her experience she can handle with authority and she contrasts."

The question of the student's engagement received considerable attention. One panelist sensed the student's engagement with the topic, saying that the student has some personal stake in her judgments. However, another did not detect any deep involvement with the issues. Rather, the panelist felt that the student was merely comfortable with the topic; indeed, that she was superficial in her treatment of it. Yet another panelist suggested that the paper was written by a student with an "energetic intellect," a student who "should be counselled to do away with vague, dull, boring diction."

A SHORT LONG VIEW OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH

Luncheon Address by Sylvan Barnet

Like most of you here today, I am a teacher; and a teacher, as Ezra Pound defined him, is a person who has to talk for an hour. But of course, in the natural world in which we teachers work, a classroom hour is only fifty minutes, and I want to assure you that I won't talk for even fifty minutes; twenty or twenty-five will be more like it.

It occurs to me that the most useful thing I can do today is not to try to define good writing. Enough other people talked about it this morning, and will talk further about it this afternoon. Nor will I talk about the latest research that has been done on ways to teach good writing. I promise not to talk about heuristics, tagmemics, pentads, or any of the other miracle-cures that fill the pages of our professional journals. Rather, I will simply tell you what I try to do, and why. That's needlessly modest; I won't tell you what I "try" to do, but what I do.

It will, I am sure, all sound very old-fashioned and simple, and so it is. That it is old-fashioned and simple is, I think, among its virtues. And if it appeals to you, you can surely do it successfully. The trouble, I might say parenthetically, with many bright new ideas is that they work only for their inventors-- highly gifted teachers, who, inspired by their gimmick, can do marvels. But the gimmick doesn't work for the rest of us, partly perhaps because we regard the gimmick as a gimmick, rather than as the truth and the cure-all that its innocent inventor holds it to be.

What, then, are the simple skills that I help my students to master? First, I expect them to be able to write a clear expository essay on a process, keeping a specific audience in mind. This means, first of all, that they must choose a topic that an imagined audience might wish, or at least need, to learn: certainly <u>not</u> "How to Set a Table," or "How to Make a Salad," but let's say, "How to Spot a Fake Picasso," or "How to Love to Eat Raw Fish."

Now, in writing about a process well known to the writer, the student is on familiar ground. The student's education comes in learning to keep the audience in mind; in learning to define terms familiar to the writer but unfamiliar to the general reader; in learning to move at an appropriate pace--slowly when covering the hard parts, more rapidly when covering the obvious parts; and most important, in learning to develop a voice (this gets into the matter of style or tone), a voice that is interesting. After all, writing, whatever the topic, must be at least moderately interesting if it is to be writing and not mere penmanship.

A second kind of essay that I usually require is a description, for example, of a photograph. Here the chief job is to observe carefully, and to get those observations down on paper, again with a specific audience in mind, for example a reader who does not have the photograph in hand.

A third essay calls for summary, and I want to spend a few minutes on this topic because it is my impression that many teachers, and almost all students, think that writing a summary is uncreative, and too simple to be worth time in college. In fact, of course, an enormous amount of published material is largely summary. A letter to the editor, for example, usually begins with at least a two or three sentence summary of the editorial that provoked the letter. Many scholarly papers begin with a summary, informing the reader of the present state of knowledge on the topic. Similarly, many reports, say by a committee, begin by summarizing the present mess that the committee's proposal will allegedly clean up. Of course, the committee's report won't really clean up the mess. How can it, since a committee is, in the words of John LeCarre, "an animal with four back legs."

Writing a thoughtful summary is neither simple nor uncreative. Rather, it is unexpectedly demanding and, as we shall see, stimulating. It requires the writer to be a discriminating reader. That is, the writer must discern the main points, distinguishing them from the subordinate points of the material being summarized. This may call for a good deal of rereading, especially if the material being summarized is difficult or badly written, perhaps because concrete details are lacking or because generalizations are lacking, or because it is poorly organized. The writer of a summary in this preparatory stage, then, comes to learn quite a bit about the need for a clear and reasonable organization.

Of course, the value of writing a summary goes further. It requires the reader, to some extent, to imitate the thought processes and the sentence structure of the original writer, and these activities can be highly educational. One learns something about the need for--even the beauty of--clarity; and one learns, by imitating, how to write clear sentences. The devices of the skilled writer become imprinted, as it were, on the novice. What begins as imitation becomes, I hope, emulation. Of course, if the material that one is summarizing is badly written, one learns that one must never write the way So-and-So does.

Preparing a summary often promotes the acquistion of a new vocabulary. You cannot skip over words that you do not know. Sometimes the meanings of these words are made reasonably clear by the context, but the meanings of other new words will come clear only with the help of a dictionary. It is highly valuable, we all know, to get students into the habit of using a dictionary. In any case, the meanings of these new words--however learned--will in large measure become a part of the student's

experience in a way that words mechanically learned in isolated textbook sentences cannot be.

The writing of summaries helps to develop the habit of analysis. One is able to see, for example, how the parts of an argument are related to each other, and almost inevitably one develops still another power, that of evaluation. For as one works, seeing how the parts relate or do not relate to the whole, one evaluates, detecting gaps or other weaknesses, or admiring the strengths, for example the strength of a clarifying detail.

Finally, writing a summary promotes an awareness of style, that most elusive--or at least most difficult to discuss--quality that every teacher of composition knows is essential to good writing. If one summarizes essays on roughly the same topic--for example, work or love or education--by, say, B. F. Skinner and by Bertrand Russell, one realizes that the differences between the arguments are also differences in style, in ways of arguing, in tone of voice, and in personality.

I have talked at greater length about writing summaries than about writing exposition and description because, as I mentioned, I think the summary is a neglected, even despised form. I want to go on now, to talk briefly about yet some other forms. I ask students to write an analysis of somebody else's argument, using summary judiciously. I also ask students to write an evaluation, where again a brief summary probably will be useful near the beginning of the essay. At this stage, say just before the middle of the semester, I am pleased if students clearly perceive the difference between summary, analysis, and evaluation in their own writing and in the writing of others.

Analyzing and evaluating another writer's argument is preparation for yet another form of writing, persuasion. "Persuasion," of course, includes "argument." That is, it includes writing that consists of statements giving reasons for other statements. But persuasion has additional weapons, beyond logic, in its armory--weapons such as wit, courtesy, appeals to the emotions, and so forth. In fact, it usually is these other devices, set forth in the right words, that win the battle. As Joseph Conrad said, "He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word."

After all, most of the things we write about--for example, whether or not to require two semesters, or even one, of composition--are not things that can be proved by logic. One can argue a case, but probably can finally persuade one's readers only by including subjective responses, making imaginative leaps, and setting forth the whole engagingly. That is, one sets forth the whole with the right words. Confronted with complex issues, such as the value of bilingual education, every wise person--not just the teacher of English--responds in the way that a good literary critic responds. What I have in mind, here, are the words of Samuel Butler: "The test of a good critic is whether he knows

when and how to believe on insufficient evidence." What compels belief in the absence of totally convincing, logical argument and evidence is the reader's confidence that the writer is a thoughtful, interesting person. I try then, to teach students to recognize that we can rarely prove something by making a strictly logical case; that we must recognize that most positions are relative. Mature writers understand this, and they know that unless they convey their understanding in writing, they will not persuade their readers.

What college teachers of compositon do, or should do, then, is pretty much what high school teachers do. But if high school teachers do this, why do we college teachers do it again? The answer, I think, is that as the students grow, they are taking on more complex material and those of us who teach in colleges are assisting students to use old, but still valuable, techniques with new material.

At least a few of you are not teachers, so I want to use the remainder of my time to talk about the value of what, in our basic composition courses, we teach to students who will enter the world of business, or who will enter other nonacademic professions.

What do we teach them? First let me tell you what we do <u>not</u> teach them. We do no teach them to write like specialists. We hope that our colleagues in the biology department, for example, will teach fledgling biologists to write like biologists, graphing their findings and then glossing the graph. We know from sad experience that our colleagues in the sociology department will teach students to write like sociologists; a cheap joke, but my point is that when specialists write for specialists, they have the privilege of using, indeed the obligation to use, the language of their special field. Thus, when physicists speak of "acceleration," they may be referring to--quite properly, but to the consternation of the layman--a <u>reduction</u> in velocity, because in physics, "acceleration" is any change in velocity. You and I may think an automobile has only one accelerator, but to a physicist, an automobile's brake is an accelerator, too.

What we teach our students in our composition classes is this: we teach them to write like specialists (that is, authorities) addressing non-specialists. We do this in two ways. One way is by all of the exercises I mentioned earlier, in which students master such forms as description, exposition (including summary), analysis, and argument. I have only hinted at the second device. We make much use of texts that provide models worth looking at. We study the writings of, say, Sissela Bok, Sir Kenneth Clark, Margaret Mead, and Lewis Thomas. That is, we study the writing of specialists who are writing for non-specialists. We study some of the ways in which these writers clarify, perhaps simplify (but not over-simplify), technical matters for the general public. In short, I am talking about the sort of thing one reads in the <u>New York Times Magazine</u>, or for that matter, the

sections of Time devoted to education, business, science, and the arts.

In giving our students models to imitate, we are, paradoxically, encouraging them to develop their own style. Style is hard to define. One might profitably devote an entire conference to style, and my time is running out, so let me merely quote what is probably the most famous remark ever made about style: "Style is the man." We must emend this remark, of course, to "Style is the man--or woman," or "Style is the person." ???, but the point is clear. Yet, it may be asked, "Is not the study of models really an impediment to the development of one's own style?" History provides the answer, I think. Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," for instance, is unthinkable without the prose of the Bible and of the Roman oratory. Again, Edmund Spenser is unthinkable without his predecessor Chaucer; Milton is unthinkable without Spenser; the young Keats is unthinkable without Milton; and though this may be less obvious, Wallace Stevens is unthinkable without Keats.

Young writers, like young anybody-elses, serve an apprenticeship that helps them to find their own way of doing things. They must, so to speak, be familiar with the great tradition so that they will see what they can add to it in their own way, and yet in a way that is part of the tradition. I recall a remark of Picasso's, in which he said:

> If you want to draw a circle and claim to be original, you don't try to give it a strange form which isn't exactly the form of a circle. Try to make the circle as best you can. And since nobody before you has made a perfect circle, you can be sure that your circle will be completely your own. Only then will you have a chance to be original.

Again history proves the point. The young Michelangelo copied Ghirlandaio, yet became Michelangelo; the young Millet copied Michaelangelo, and became Millet; Van Gogh, even in his maturity, copied Millet. Or, to return to Picasso, in his youth he was strongly influenced by Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Daumier, and among older artists, Velazquez. In 1901, for instance, when Picasso was twenty, he made a copy of part of Velazquez' Maids of Honor fifty-six years later, he was still painting versions of the Maids of Honor. And in 1957 he produced an extremely close copy in pen and ink of Rembrandt's Man Wearing a Helmet. As Picasso said, "Copy others is necessary, but what a pity to copy oneself." The point, of course, is not that one should plagiarize, but rather that, to make something new, one must know what has already been done. As I said before, I am talking not only about imitation, but about emulation.

It is especially true that young people must see the way the masters do things. The young cabinet-maker, the young potter, the young photographer, the young athlete--all of these begin to

learn their trade by seeing how the experts perform. Or, to introduce a metaphor, they move through a kind of vast rummage sale, picking up the bits that will assist them to make their own contribution. Something like this, I believe, is the justification for teaching the personal essay; the essay that presents not only the ideas, but also presents the writer as a person with a distinctive voice. When students read Virginia Woolf or George Orwell or E.B. White, say, they can see (with a little help from the teacher, perhaps) that a personal voice can exist very comfortably along with the demand for clarity and for analytical thinking.

This sort of training (and, as I have just said, the training includes the use of "literary" models, such as Virginia Woolf's writings) is of use to the student who--though we hope not--may never again be in touch with literature. From such models, students learn how to develop a voice, and how to interest--indeed, persuade--the non-specialists who read their writing. These readers may be within the writer's own organization. Let's say they're business executives reading a report arguing that maternity leave should be included in the benefits package. Or the readers may be part of a larger public, say the general public reading a report, written for this audience, on the environmental impact of a proposed shopping mall. You may have read in the newspapers recently, angry letters deploring the story that Clarkson College is planning to replace its library with what it calls an Educational Resources Center. I think this fuss really arose from, to use a tired expression, a failure of communication. Somehow, the professionals at Clarkson did not manage to make clear to the general public that they were not banning books. It finally took the president of Clarkson (or perhaps a member of his staff) to write a letter to the Times explaining that the Educational Resources Center uses computer technology to expand library services, and not to eliminate books from the library. But I may have digressed--my point is that writers who have learned from the composition course will be able to persuade the reader that they have identified and defined a problem, and second, they will be able to persuade the reader that they are people worth listening to.

Although I have been assuming that what we teach is useful, even when we teach literary essays, I want now to turn my back on the relevance to professionalism of college courses in writing. I want to mention briefly that the liberal arts college ought to be a place where students can learn what is not necessarily "useful" in the narrow sense. Most people in college, after all, are at a time in their lives when they are moving away from tight family ties but have not yet established new moorings. Further, the element of play is still strong, the sense of adventure, the sense of flexing one's muscles--physical and mental. Fortunately, teachers of writing (in high school and college) need not make the painful choice between teaching what is practical and teaching what is liberal (that is, mentally enlarging), or even between what is liberal and what is fun. An essay by Virginia

Woolf is all of these. The students may not see it this way at the beginning of the course, but we can try to help them to see it this way by the end of the course.

Similarly, practice in revising one's own essays is not simply practice in a practical matter--the business of getting an A, or the business of becoming adept at writing, so that ten years later one can write company reports. It is practical, and also liberal, in another way. When we teach writing, and especially when we teach revising, we are teaching students not only how to express ideas but how to <u>have</u> ideas. One writes down one's rudimentary ideas, and then, in re-reading comes to see that they are nonsense, or at least that they need a good deal of refining. Not until one wrote the first draft did one know that the ideas were so thick. But that first draft, read critically, stimulates the writer to better ideas, ideas that would have been unthought had the draft not provoked them by its inadequacy. And when one revises, since one gets better ideas, one becomes at least to a small degree, a better person. The classic statement of this point comes from William Butler Yeats, who was an endless reviser of his poems, especially in his later years when he substantially rewrote many of his early lyrics. This rewriting distressed some of his friends, who said he was messing up his thoroughly satisfactory early works. Here is Yeat's reply:

> The friends that have it I do wrong
> When ever I remake a song,
> Should know what issue is at stake:
> It is myself that I remake.

Those of you who are not teachers and who are looking at our graduates as future collaborators, then, are not faced with the choice of deciding between two pools of students--the self-confident young specialists, on the one hand, or the introspective liberally educated men and women, on the other hand. As teachers of writing, we try to help our students become the kinds of people you want as colleagues: adults who are richly informed, able to think rationally, able to grow mentally, able to write thoughtfully and interestingly; people who respond to the world around them, and who make others feel their thoughtful response through their words.

Finally, since my colleagues who specialize in the teaching of writing usually talk authoritatively about tagmemics and heuristics and pentads, you might well ask me, "Do you know what you are talking about?" and "How can you prove it?" The answer to the second question, how can I prove it, is that I cannnot. But I am confident that I <u>know</u> it, and I want to end now with a passage from Chuang Tzu, the Chinese sage who lived more than 2000 years ago.

> Chuang Tzu and Hui Tzu were strolling along the dam of the Yellow River when Chuang Tzu said, "See how the minnows come out and dart around where

they please! That's what fish really enjoy."

Hui Tzu said, "You're not a fish--how do you know what fish enjoy?"

Chuang Tzu said, "You're not I, so how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?"

Hui Tzu said, "I'm not you, so I certainly don't know what you know. On the other hand, you're certainly not a fish--so that still proves you don't know what fish enjoy."

Chuang Tzu said, "Let's go back to your original question, please. You asked me how I know what fish enjoy--so you already know I knew it when you asked the question. I know it by standing here."

(Translated by Burton Watson)

THE AFTERNOON SESSION

The afternoon session of the University of Connecticut's conference on "What is Good Writing?" focused on criteria for writing in various fields. The following workshops were held during the afternoon sessions:

1. Writing for Business
   Jean Smith, Robin Ray, Madelyn Vozzola
   Aetna Life and Casualty

2. Writing for Science
   Anthony Philpotts, Raymond Joesten
   Professors, Department of Geology and Geophysics
   University of Connecticut

3. Writing for History
   R. Kent Newmyer, Professor of History
   Department of History
   University of Connecticut

4. Writing for the Social Sciences
   Jack Thaw, Professor of Psychology
   Department of Psychology
   University of Connecticut

5. Writing for Publishing
   Charles Christensen
   Bedford Brooks of St. Martin's Press

Each workshop ran for about two hours; conferees could choose to attend one of the concurrent workshops.

Workshop leaders began each workshop by explaining the standards, values, and purposes for writing in their fields; then they led discussions on how these qualities could be developed in the classroom. Some workshop leaders displayed examples of writing done by their colleagues, while others described of the kinds of writing assignments they give.

Workshop leaders in all five fields shared the conviction that good writing is precise, accurate, concise, and clear.

Whatever the field, writers should use a tone and diction appropriate to the audience and should strive for logical organization and a prose that is simple, direct, crisp, and grammatical. Good writing is informative, persuasive, and interesting to the reader.

Unfortunately, we are able only to include reports on the first four workshops.

Writing for History

Professor R. Kent Newmyer, workshop leader of "Writing for History," gave as a sample assignment the Family History Paper, used in History 104 at the University of Connecticut. The purpose of the Family History Paper is to have each student "put his family in the context of history," thus providing an occasion for personal engagement with the subject.

For the Family History Paper, students must gather their raw material from oral interviews with friends and relatives and from family letters, diaries, scrapbooks, church records, etc. They must then determine an historical context for the material they've gathered. The bulk of their information may concern World War II, the Great Depression, or the Immigration experience. Having decided upon a focus (upward mobility or the American Dream, for example), students are asked first to outline, then to write, and finally to revise their papers. Furthermore, students must hand in not only their final papers but also their notes and drafts.

The value of the Family History Paper assignment is that

students must collect information, find their own sources, and record specific behavior. They must select the most important information from what they learn about their family's history, and they must place that information in the context of history. Students must think of their own interview questions, record the answers they are given, and transfer the information accurately from oral to written form. Finally, they must use library research to provide the context of the history they write.

Writing for Science

Professors Anthony Philpotts and Raymond Joesten, workshop leaders of "Writing for Science," stressed that the major goals of writing in science are accuracy and objectivity. As a sample assignment, Professor Philpotts requires students to submit abstracts of papers they write. By writing an abstract restricted to 250 words, students learn to write concisely and clearly, and to avoid phrases like "is described" and "are discussed."

In another assignment, an essay devoted to describing an object, students learn to record their observations accurately. This assignment engages the student in accuracy of diction, organization, and comprehensiveness.

Writing for the Social Sciences

Professor Jack Thaw, workshop leader of "Writing for the Social Sciences," explained that social science students must record occurrences of specific, narrowly defined behavior; they must, therefore, learn accuracy and objectivity in recording their observations. Social science students must also fit their observations into theories required to explain a particular behavior; they must then make inferences. Explanations must be selected to account for the observed behavior; after an explanation has been selected, students must test the appropriateness of the theory to see if it is consistent with the observed behavior.

As a sample assignment, Professor Thaw suggested that teachers place their students before video screens and ask them to record the behavior they see. The students must use careful observation of detail and accurate word choice, which will not attach judgment to the person observed. They must, finally, fit the observed behavior into a theory.

Writing for Business

Jean Smith, Robin Ray, and Madelyn Vozzola, workshop leaders for "Writing for Business," stressed that business memos must be concise, direct, and accurate. The business memo is written primarily to get the reader to act; it must therefore be logical and persuasive.

The pages that follow offer detailed summaries of these four workshop presentations.

WRITING FOR BUSINESS

Jean Smith, Robin Ray, Madelyn Vozzola
Aetna Life and Casualty

I. Introduction

Smith, Ray, and Vozzola all belong to the Documentation and Training Services Unit in Corporate Data Processing at Aetna. One of the several writing units in the corporation, the Training Services Unit supports other units on a consulting basis during peak workloads. The writing produced within the corporation ranges from inter-office memos to training materials for underwriters. Marketing, customer service, management and training of staff, and compliance with government regulations are all areas within any business in which good writing is essential.

II. Kinds and Functions of Business Writing

A. Public Relations Writing requires flexibility in writing style for forms that range from videoscripting and speech writing to advertising.

B. Employee Relations requires clear written communication between employees and employers.

C. Customer Relations requires simplicity and appropriate tone in writing instructions, directions for filling out forms, to avoid frustration of customers and staff.

D. Operations (the back office) depends on reference and procedure materials, policies, guidelines.

E. Training requires orientation materials that may explain how to answer a phone and deal with people or how to use and interpret high-level data processing languages. Because training cannot always be done in a classroom setting, programmed texts, computer-based education programs, and self-paced instructional materials must be written.

All areas of business require good basic writing skills and flexibility of style.

III. Principles of Good Writing in Business

A. Clarity: All business writing is done for a purpose--to inform or to initiate action. If the printed material is

unclear, the purpose won't be achieved. Business writers are advised to:

1. Use simple, familiar words and avoid jargon and acronyms.

2. Write in simple, direct sentences.

3. Use the physical set-up of the page to punctuate ideas.

4. Employ helpful tags such as "Purpose" and "Background."

The reader should be able to grasp the meaning on the first reading.

B. Brevity: The reader should be able to pick out the theme quickly. Because different levels or areas of business need different kinds of information, all readers should be readily able to locate what they need. Unnecessary details should be eliminated. To develop conciseness in writing, business personnel recommend that the writer:

1. Replace a phrase with a single word if possible.

2. Use contractions and adopt a conversational tone if appropriate.

3. Eliminate unspecific modifiers such as very or real that don't enhance the meaning.

4. Use active voice verbs, which have more impact and suggest action.

The writer must be careful, however, not to sacrifice completeness.

C. Audience Awareness: Writers should know their audience and adapt their vocabulary and tone accordingly. The writing unit at Aetna uses the FOG index to determine the reading levels of its audience. It's also important for the writer to take responsibility for what is being said, to use "I" if appropriate, and to give the names of people being referred to in the written material.

D. Organization: Aetna encourages writers to compose an outline before they write. Business writers, because they usually want the reader to act, must be careful to lead the reader logically through the train of thought. Legibility and neatness are also important.

IV. Written Products Produced by a Company

The Aetna representatives distributed an array of written material that the company produces to illustrate the variety of audiences and purposes of business writing. Among the materials were flashy brochures to stimulate interest in the company's products or to provide information on the products, a brochure used for recruiting Aetna employees, informative brochures for visitors to the company that explain Aetna's facilities, a brochure used to make employees comfortable about a transfer, newsletters to independent Aetna agents that keep them informed of Aetna issues and services, a pamphlet for employees that explains their benefits, and a magazine with articles on issues in the insurance industry and educational articles on such topics as good business writing. The Aetna representatives also handed out samples of business memos, minutes, press releases, pages from training manuals, taskforce studies, letters, federal regulations, and financial contracts, and they explained the qualities of writing needed for these various forms.

Writing for History

R. Kent Newmyer, Professor of History

University of Connecticut

I. Opening Remarks

Professor Newmyer explained that he operates from a basic premise about the relationship of writing to knowledge: "If you don't have something to write about, you can't talk of style." Before starting to write, you must understand the intellectual requirements of the task. Professor Newmyer also said that reading affects writing. If a student draws his material from a textbook, for instance, the student's writing style is likely to imitate the textbook's. More important is that the student is likely to have only a one-dimensional view of the problem he is writing about.

II. Question-Answer Period

A. Writing Requirements for History Courses

1. Critical discernment in judging secondary accounts.

2. Well-developed techniques of summary and critical argument.

3. A sense of logic and of what's persuasive and why.

Some Assignments Newmyer Gives:

1. Students read seven articles on reserve in the library that concern one topic, and write a synthesis.

2. Students read Supreme Court decisions and evaluate them critically.

B. Shared Values in Writing

1. Clarity
2. Logic
3. Ability to persuade

C. Special Problems of Historical Writing

1. Because historians do not usually write from firsthand observations, their writing must be essentially persuasive: they must convince the reader to take a leap of faith.

2. Historians are always obliged to write from documents.

3. Historians must defend not only what they say but how they say it. Rhetorical flights, for instance, could be a form of distortion.

D. What the Historical Writer Must Consider

1. What limits does the subject matter of documents impose upon your style?

2. What kind of style best fits the kind of history you are writing?

3. Does the subject matter require a particular tone or feeling? Writing about your grandmother and writing about the causes of the American Revolution require different tones, for instance. Professor Newmyer noted that historical writing may become boring when the writer settles simply for correctness.

E. Kinds of Writing High School Students Should Do in Preparation for College History Courses

Writing and Reading:

To write well, a student must read, but teachers of history now have problems finding appropriate models of history writing for students to read. In the nineteenth century, historical writers were members of a highly educated elite writing about grand events for the literate

few. Models of style in the nineteenth century stood out. The twentieth century has produced many historical writers, including school teachers and graduate students, all with their own styles. Thus, there is diversity in historical writing today; consequently, standards of good historical writing have been greatly diffused. Professor Newmyer suggested that history teachers ask students to read more history and select an historian worthy of emulation. Professor Newmyer usually chooses Carl Becker as a model. The teacher, he said, should then talk to the students about why the writing is good.

Writing and Knowledge:

The great enemy of good writing is ignorance of the historical context, sources, and documents. Professor Newmyer suggested that teachers direct students to documents, the real materials of history.

III. History 104

A. Nature of the Course

History 104, which Professor Newmyer teaches, is a general course which covers a wide range of material. Each class has 60 students and two full-time assistants, and each student must write a long paper.

B. Family History Paper

1. Purpose: Students must "explore the unique character" of their own families, putting them in the context of history. This paper helps students understand their roots and the nature of history and gives them experience in historical writing. The great virtue of this assignment, Professor Newmyer explained, is that it engages the students more personally in history.

2. Procedure

   a. The students must gather the raw material for their papers from oral interviews with friends and relatives and from family letters, diaries, scrapbooks, church records, etc.

   b. The students must then determine an historical context for the material they've gathered. The bulk of their information may concern World War II, the Great Depression, or the immig[illegible]ion experience.

   c. Next the students must decide on a focus; upward mobility, or the American Dream, for example.

d. Students are asked first to outline, then to write, finally to revise. They must hand in not only their final papers but also their notes and drafts.

3. Value of Assignment

a. The students do real historical writing: they write not from secondary sources but from first-hand accounts and documents. By validating and integrating information from different sources, students learn how to write and how to think historically.

b. Students must use a wide variety of writing techniques: description, summary, anecdote, and interpretation. Students also learn to choose the appropriate techniques and style for the material, and to develop their own styles.

IV. Discussion of Samples of Historical Writing

Professor Newmyer advised teachers to have their students read both good and bad history. He examined one historical piece in which the historian allows methodology take command of the language and one who takes a more sophisticated approach. He also pointed out one example where the sentences made sense individually but were incoherent as a whole. Historical writing, Professor Newmyer said, is particularly difficult because the writer must oscillate constantly between source material and his own generalizations.

Writing for Science

Anthony Philpotts and Raymond Joesten
Professors of Geology and Geophysics
University of Connecticut

I. Interest in Writing in the Geology and Geophysics Department at the University of Connecticut

Professor Philpotts explained that his department is concerned about students' ability to write. Too often, he said, they do poorly on exams because they cannot write, and frequently the students have to spend as much time writing a thesis as researching the topic. He expressed his belief that time spent rewriting is time well-spent, that clear writing produces clear thinking. He tries, therefore, to get his students to write parts of their theses as soon as possible, and he has found that writing helps students see how to improve their research techniques.

To improve the writing of its students, the Geology and Geophysics department requires that juniors and seniors take courses that emphasize writing. Students must first take a course in which they must spend the semester writing a term paper, using data from secondary sources. They are required at different points throughout the semester to submit a bibliography, an outline, and numerous drafts. The final paper should be of publishable quality. Next, students take a six-credit Petrology course which requires an original research paper in a form acceptable for publication. By writing this kind of paper, students learn to organize their own material--a task that is difficult for many of them. In their senior year, students must take a two-semester course in applied geophysics. Each week they must submit a ten to fifteen page report on a particular geophysics problem in a form consultants would use in their reports to a company. The writing projects are graded for both science and English.

To aid students in their writing, Professor Philpotts directs them to two books available in the bookstore: Suggestions to Authors of Reports to the U.S. Geological Survey, a book about writing problems similar to Barnet & Stubbs's handbook but with examples drawn from geology, and Geo-writing.

II. Requirements of Good Scientific Writing

Good scientific writing should be concise, clear, logical and interesting. Professor Philpotts pointed out that the requirements of good writing in science are not very different from the requirements of other disciplines. Students need to learn how to get their points across efficiently and logically. Some of the papers Philpotts reads have more serious problems in logic than those papers discussed in the morning session of the conference. Too often students describe the way things should be according to their hypotheses rather than according to the facts or what can be ascertained as facts. This procedure, he said, is dangerous in a discipline that deals with causes and effects.

III. Writing Abstracts

To help students develop conciseness, clarity, and logic, Professor Philpotts requires students to submit abstracts of papers they write. All scientific journals, he said, now require abstracts of articles they publish. By writing an abstract restricted to 250 words, students learn to write concisely and clearly and to avoid phrases like "is described" and "are discussed." Professor Philpotts distributed a description of an exercise on writing abstracts, a reprint on how to write an abstract ("A Scrutiny of the Abstract," American Association of Petroleum Geologists), and examples of well written and poorly written abstracts. The workshop participants discussed the shortcomings of the sample abstracts and

the ways they could be improved. Many students, Professor Philpotts noted, will write simply a table of contents with verbs stuck in. This kind of abstract tells the reader nothing substantial about the paper. One English teacher in the workshop suggested that there are two kinds of abstracts: one that tells the reader what the form or shape of the paper will be and one that summarizes the content of the paper. Professor Philpotts explained that scientific journals print abstracts to relieve scientists of the extra reading time needed to keep up with the proliferating literature in the field. Scientific abstracts, then, must inform.

IV. Question-Answer Period

A number of people in the workshop asked whether scientific writing could be made interesting. Professor Philpotts answered that no editor wishes to publish dry work. If a paper requires a development of ideas, he said, the writer can make it fascinating. If the paper is simply a tabulation of data, little writing is required anyway. Papers that get ideas across well, he claimed, will be interesting. In response to a question about what makes a paper interesting, Professor Philpotts said that style is important. A reader should sense personality in the voice of the paper. Most journals, he said, do not require a uniform style for all articles. Although it is easier to show style in the interpretation of data, a writer can also reveal style in his way of presenting the data or reviewing the literature. But the reader should not be more aware of style than of content. Professor Joesten pointed out that clarity of thought also makes a paper interesting. It is important for the writer to keep the reader aware of the purpose and direction of the article. The reader should be able to follow the paper easily from the data to the writer's conclusion. Furthermore, it's important for the writer to pose questions so that the reader will want to read the next paragraphs, and to write as directly, clearly, and smoothly as possible, avoiding constructions like "there is" or "there are."

V. Objects of Scientific Writing

Professor Joesten explained that the objects of scientific writing are similar to the general aim of all writing as outlined by Sylvan Barnet in his luncheon talk. Professor Joesten then suggested what a technical paper should do:

1. A technical paper should convey information accurately, clearly and briefly. The paper should be developed logically so that the reader and author can arrive at the same conclusion simultaneously. To help his students improve the accuracy, brevity, and clarity of their writing, Professor Joesten suggested that teachers ask

students to describe a process (how to drive a car, how to brush your teeth). Sequence in this kind of paper is important for the whole to make sense. He also suggested that students describe an object, such as a pipe wrench, and then ask other members of the class to read the description and figure out what's being described.

2. Scientific papers must be documented adequately and accurately.

3. Technical information must be expressed simply, with as little technical language or jargon as possible. Professor Joesten tries to get his students to use a simple word or phrase rather than a term with a definition useful only to the writer. The student must think about his audience.

VI. Professor Joesten's Minerology Course

Professor Joesten claimed that students have the greatest difficulty in organizing material. Their problem is not what they are going to write but how they are going to take information from different sources and put it into a coherent story. Professor Joesten has the students in his class read each other's papers and comment on their logical sequence, clarity, and completeness. A research paper, he said, teaches the student to summarize clearly and succinctly, to integrate material on different subjects, and to write conclusions that tie ideas together.

VII. General Discussion

A. Professor Joesten pointed out that attitude is important in developing a professional. Too many students approach writing without a sense of craftsmanship. Teachers need to encourage students to feel proud about their work, to want to present their ideas in a clear and polished way.

B. Professor Philpotts suggested that students need more practice in describing objects and their functions. Many children, he said, are given topics that require them to spend more time thinking about what to write than actually writing. As a result, children don't practice writing enough. Professor Philpotts suggested topics which require only description. Often he has found that students can't describe accurately because their descriptions are tied up with interpretation, and an error in interpretation will affect the description. Sometimes, he said, unimaginative students never become good writers because they can't come up with ideas for papers.

C. One member of the workshop suggested that other departments should show the English department what kinds of

writing assignments they give. Another member said that English teachers could use the assignments of other departments and adapt them to English material. A high school teacher then pointed out that the science teacher should also teach writing; the English department cannot do everything.

Writing for the Social Sciences

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I. Importance of Writing in the Social Sciences

Writing in the social sciences takes a variety of forms and is addressed to a variety of audiences. In the last decade, especially in clinical and administrative areas, good writing skills have become essential: they can make a difference in the evaluation of the social scientists' performance and can affect decisions made on the basis of scientific principles. Many employers require writing samples in recruiting and in hiring. Good professional writing must therefore be cultivated and practiced.

II. Particular Problems and Requirements of Writing in the Social Sciences

A. Precision

In the physical sciences, quantitative data help to ensure precision in writing. Social sciences, which are in an earlier phase of development, have less mathematical precision; consequently, the language used in writing must be precise.

1. The content of the social sciences is more elusive; thus, careful observation is mandatory.

2. The quantitative and theoretical bases of the social sciences are less well developed than in the physical sciences; consequently, vocabulary and syntax in the social sciences must be accurate.

3. Inquiry into the subject matter of the social sciences is a personal and subjective exercise.

4. Social sciences depend upon observational data, and the instrument of observation is the writer. Accurate observational recording is the primary task of writing. Students tend to record their

interpretations rather than their observations. For example, they may describe a person as "angry" instead of recording the "angry" behavior they see. They may use sloppy communicators like hostile or upset. To help his students describe their observations more accurately, Professor Thaw has required his students to sit before video-recorders and write what they observe. Once reliable enough, these observational skills are tested in natural clinical and program settings.

B. Interpretation

Social scientists must interpret behavior, a subject that is already elastic. Since behavior is difficult to describe reliably, interpretations must be made with great care. Interpretation in the social sciences is a writing of caution: writers must learn accuracy in their use of such things as disclaimer, caveat, and qualification. Since the social scientist's audience expects technical precision, social science writers must learn to acknowledge inconclusiveness when it is appropriate to describe the conclusion that is suggested by the data, to ascribe a probability to an outcome. A word carelessly used can be seriously misleading. Careless interpretations could lead readers to attach unfair stigmas to the person described. For example, to write that a person has "retarded" reactions is different from saying that a person is "retarded." The social scientist's diction will affect the way that both the writer and the reader relate to the person observed.

C. Audience

Because social sciences address a wide variety of audiences, they must learn to adjust their writing to their readers. Writing is required in research, in the development of policy, in clinical work. Each of these areas has its own particular tasks, audiences, and systems of writing. A clinical style, for instance, would be inappropriate for a legal defense; similarly, the language of research can rarely be applied to statements of policy.

III. Fundamentals of Writing in the Social Sciences

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (1974) provides excellent suggestions for writing in this field.

A. Precision

1. Every word should mean exactly what it is intended to

mean (e.g., the proper distinction between disinterested and uninterested.)

2. Qualifiers should be specific (for example, avoid the vagueness of "almost always," "practically all").

3. If word choice is not specific and precise, a report may mislead clinicians and policy makers.

4. All descriptions must be detailed and complete.

B. Freedom from Ambiguity

1. References must be clear.

2. Paragraph transitions must be logical.

C. Orderly Presentation of Ideas

1. Thought units and sequence must be orderly.

2. Logical sequence of words, concepts, and thematic developments from the opening of the paper to the conclusion is essential.

3. Students should not shift their criteria for items in a series, nor should they clutter their thought sequences with irrelevant data.

4. Students should not misplace words in sentences or abandon familiar syntax.

5. Students should reread their writing at least once to look for logical organization and coherence. Thereafter, they should proofread several times.

D. Economy in Expression

1. Students should use simple expressions: they should avoid the cryptic and abstract and write in simple sentences of varied lengths and rhythms.

2. Long, involved concepts should be organized as a parade, not a broken field run.

3. The writer must provide the reader both direction and focus (i.e., "This behavior indicates a need for...").

4. When writing long papers, students should divide the material into subsections.

E. Coherence

1. Students should avoid contradictions, insertions of

the unexpected, omission of the expected, sudden shifts in the middle of the theme; in short, anything that would distract the reader.

2. The writer should try to read his own work as a member of his audience might read it.

F. Consideration of the Reader

1. The student must guide the reader through the writing, offering rhetorical signposts and organizational aids.

2. An important social science writing device is periodic summary and conclusion.

V. Suggestions for Teachers

A. Teachers should encourage students to read their writing critically, from the perspective of a reader as well as a writer.

B. Students must read good social science writing to get a sense of its rhythms, conventions, and organizations.

C. Students must overcome the myth that writing is a first-draft affair. They must learn craftsmanship in the use of language, and they should have ample practice in translating thought into writing. A sample assignment might ask students to write several versions of the same essay for different audiences so they can learn the appropriate rhythm, diction, and mechanics. Supervised writing is important. Often at the high school and college level teachers provide minimal commentary about the student's writing techniques, choosing instead to attend to the content alone.

VI. Conclusion

Although social scientists foresee improved precision in the instruments of research, improvements which will make writing easier, the elusiveness of the subject matter, especially for clinicians, will remain. Students must assume the responsibility for making themselves better writers. They must develop solid revising and editing skills. Students should be taught that writing is difficult, but rewarding. Perhaps they will then apply themselves rather than avoid writing tasks. Professor Thaw also encouraged more research on student writing.

The Connecticut Writing Project is supported by the University of Connecticut, participating school districts, and the following contributors:

Mr. Bob Eddy
The National Writing Project
The National Endowment for the Humanities
The Connecticut Humanities Council
The Aetna Life and Casualty Company
The Fairfield County Cooperative Foundation
The Barnes Foundation
The University of Connecticut Alumni Association
The Hartford Courant Foundation
The Elizabeth Carse Foundation
The University of Connecticut Foundation
The Covenant Group
The South Windsor Rotary Club
The Pleasant Valley P.T.O. (South Windsor)
The Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy
of Greater Hartford P.T.O.
The Connecticut State Department of Education
and many other generous donors.